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A district commissioner is an appointed or elected member of the governing body of a conservation district. In taking the Oath of Office, a commissioner commits to exercising the rights and responsibilities of Commissioners as spelled out in Soil and Water Conservation Districts Law, Sec. 48-9-10 of the South Carolina Code of Laws.

This law charges conservation districts with the responsibility of providing first-line leadership in developing and implementing plans to meet conservation needs of the district. It also charges districts with the responsibility of finding the resources with which to plan and implement programs that will address the conservation needs of the district.

In order to be an effective member of the conservation district board a commissioner must:

- Be familiar with the state law.
- Help identify conservation needs and assist with the planning to address these needs. Planning should be done on an annual and long-range basis.
- Work with all agencies with conservation interests and expertise to meet conservation needs.
- Cooperate with other districts and/or agencies to develop and carry out conservation plans.
- Determine funding needs and find sources of funds to meet the conservation needs.
- Keep the public informed about your conservation programs.
- Stay abreast of conservation issues and speak out wherever and whenever you have the opportunity to educate the public on issues that affect our natural resources.
- Find ways to evaluate the progress of your conservation programs. Evaluations should be done annually and on a long-range basis.
- Work with other districts through the S.C. Association of Conservation Districts to help the Land, Water and Conservation Division of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources develop programs that are suitable to your district.
- **Finally, never relinquish your responsibilities to your staff!** Staff, whether district, SCDNR or Natural Resources and Conservation Service, exist to help you carry out the programs you help formulate. Your responsibility is to plan and to implement these programs; theirs is to assist you in this effort.

CONSERVATION AUTHORITY AND OVERVIEW

State law created conservation districts to provide grass roots leadership for developing and implementing conservation activities. In South Carolina, district boundaries are the same as county boundaries. There is a conservation district in each county. Conservation districts are subdivisions of state government.

Soil and water conservation districts are organized pursuant to Sec. 48-9-10 of the South Carolina Code of Laws. (*See appendix*) The Soil and Water Conservation Districts Law provides general powers and authorities of conservation districts and conservation district commissioners.

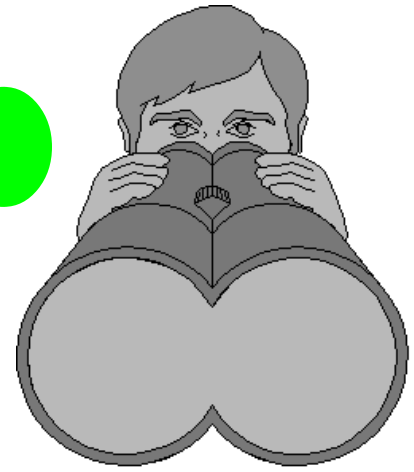
Conservation districts are unique; no other agency has the responsibility that districts have. If conservation activities are to take place within a district, the district must initiate them. Other government agencies and groups may assist in these efforts, but the responsibility rests, by law, with the conservation district. This is probably the most important aspect of conservation districts.

CONSERVATION DISTRICT PURPOSES

- To be responsible to the citizens of the district in matters involving resource conservation.
- To promote the wise and responsible use of natural resources.
- To develop and implement programs to protect and conserve soil, water, farmland, wood land, wildlife, energy, and riparian and wetland resources.

This handbook will provide more information about districts and the details on how you, as a commissioner, can accomplish your responsibilities.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMMISSIONERS' ROLES



PROGRAMS

Commissioners must identify local conservation needs, set goals, and develop plans to achieve those goals, and ensure implementation of the plan in order to maintain effective programs.

PLANNING

Planning is the basic tool for developing conservation district programs.

A **Long-Range Plan** is developed by the district and updated as needed. A major revision is completed every five years. This plan serves as a broad outline of your district's response to long term shifts in land use, population patterns and improvements in technology. It includes goals for all Partners: NRCS, SCDNR, District Employees and the Board of Commissioners.

An **Annual Work Plan** outlines specific objectives and activities to achieve long-range plans. The following are **guidelines** for all plans:

- The district, with its partners, must assess and define the conservation problems and needs of the district.
- All commissioners, associate commissioners, cooperating agency representatives and interested citizens should be involved.
- Commissioners should do the planning, not the paid staff. They provide you with basic information and advice.
- Keep the plan simple.
- Evaluate your success after the plan is implemented.

Information and Education

Conservation districts encourage volunteer cooperation of land users and the general public through information and education programs. Landowners and operators must be educated so they will understand and adopt conservation values and practices. The general public must be reached so they will understand their stake in conservation and contribute their financial, political, and volunteer support to district programs. You must also inform local, state, and federal legislators on conservation issues. Commissioners should be aware of the many ways available to communicate their message. A few examples are as follows:

- personal contact
- inviting persons to district board meetings
- newsletters
- field tours
- demonstrations
- workshops
- awards programs
- newsletters

LEGISLATORS

Legislators are an important audience. Local, state, and federal laws affect district programs. Make personal contacts with all of your legislators by letter or phone calls and inform them of your conservation accomplishments and of your conservation needs. Bring your statewide and national legislative concerns to The South Carolina State Association of Conservation Districts (SCACD) and the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

YOUTH EDUCATION

A major aim of conservation education is to enrich the conservation values of people. Youth education offers one of the most fertile avenues for this enrichment. Conservation districts should develop a wide variety of methods to reach youth. Some are as follows:

- sponsoring conservation workshops
- training teachers in conservation
- providing educational materials
- involving youth leaders in board meetings
- organizing a “youth board”
- developing programs and projects that involve youth
- locating conservation projects that are meaningful to youth
- assisting in developing outdoor classrooms
- planning demonstrations and tours

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Your conservation district's public image affects every aspect of your work. Public relations is a continuing program to help people understand what your conservation district is, what you are doing and why it is important. Good public relations can:

- inform the public of what the conservation district is and does
- promote favorable recognition of the district
- ensure that all the people in your district are aware of the availability of district assistance
- build rapport with other groups
- increase the amount of funds that your district receives
- increase the quality and amount of assistance the district obtains from cooperating agencies
- improve the quality of people who serve as conservation district commissioners or on conservation committees

The district should set goals for the basic understanding you would like the public to have about your district. In developing and maintaining your district's public relations program, make sure all information is consistent.

- Board members and associate commissioners should represent the board in person. Do not rely on paid staff.
- Pay attention to public relations details throughout your district program; treat people warmly over the phone and in correspondence. Follow through on commitments, pay attention to cultural differences, and give adequate recognition to agencies, associations and other groups with whom you work.
- The board should determine who speaks on its behalf.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Whether you are engaging in information, education, public relations, or all three, you will use a whole range of media from personal contacts to mass media. Establish friendly, mutually helpful relationships with the media representatives. If you convince them of the importance of your program, they will convince the public. In order that your district may have effective media relations you must decide:

- why you want media coverage
- who your audiences are
- which media would be most effective in reaching different audiences



COMMITTEES

Conservation districts may accomplish their work through committees. Committees study district business in specific areas, such as finance or tree programs, and sift out important matters for the board to consider. Committees also implement and monitor decisions made by the board and gather support from organizations and agencies represented on the committee.

There are many different types of committees. A “standing committee” is a permanent committee charged with working on a basic aspect of district work. Conservation districts typically have standing committees for planning, district operations, education, finance, research, land-use planning, water quality, recreation, water resources, and soil stewardship.

Other functions of your district may require short term or “ad hoc” committees for a specific task or time period. Examples may include watershed, nominating, annual meeting, or grant committees.

The chair and board members appoint themselves, associate commissioners, district advisors, representatives of cooperating agencies and associations, or interested citizens as committee members. Look to people with an active or personal or professional interest in the committee’s purpose. Committees also serve as an entry point and training ground for people who may eventually become a district commissioner.

Committees have no legal or official authority and cannot vote on the district board’s business or obligate district funds. However, encourage their participation. Be sure to include opportunities at board meetings for recognition of committee progress. Regardless of whether a committee is “ad hoc” or “standing”, each should have a specific mission similar to a job description for an individual.

YOUR BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

*As a commissioner,
you should be asking
some primary questions.*



As an individual board member, are you:

- attending and actively participating in all board meetings?
- carrying out your committee responsibilities?
- keeping abreast of local natural resource issues?
- attending area and state conservation meetings?

As a District Board are you:

- identifying local conservation district goals and achieving them?
- keeping your conservation district's mission in focus?
- working effectively with district staff and cooperating agencies?
- effectively implementing district programs?
- making sure your board's policies and activities are consistent with state law?
- following correct budget and audit procedures?
- reporting to the public on your district programs?

COMMISSIONER DEVELOPMENT

After a new commissioner takes office, welcome them with a letter or phone call and issue news releases announcing their new position. Formally orient new commissioners at board meetings and through personal visits. Special training workshops are held by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources-Land, Water and Conservation Division. It is also useful to periodically rotate board members to different positions and committee assignments to broaden their experience.

ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONERS

Associate commissioners are officially appointed by the board as advisors and representatives. Associates do not vote on board decisions but augment the board's knowledge and experience and assist with conservation district programs. They also offer a way to cultivate potential new commissioners, allow former commissioners to remain active in the district, and broaden community input to the district. Every two years, districts should review their roster of associate commissioners. Be sure to orient associates just as you would commissioners, and involve them in meaningful activities and projects.

OFFICES OF THE BOARD

District Boards of Commissioners normally elect the following officers in February and they take office immediately.

- Chair
- Vice-chair
- Secretary
- Treasurer

Some boards combine the positions of Secretary and Treasurer.

According to SCACD Policy, offices should rotate among the board members



THE CHAIR

calls, convenes, oversees and adjourns all meetings of the Board. The Chair assures that:

- A quorum is present to conduct business.
- Freedom of Information requirements are met (see Appendix).
- All partners who are making reports are present. At a minimum the Chair assures that the Board will receive reports from NRCS, SCDNR and its employee(s).
- Agenda is ready for each meeting and is adhered to during the meetings.
- Keeps the meeting discussions short and relevant to the business at hand.
- Oversees the establishment of committees.
- Makes sure the long-range plan and annual plan of work are written and enacted on time and carried out on an appropriate time schedule.
- Checks in with the office frequently to assure its efficient operation.
- Discusses issues that arise and keeps up good communication between the staff and the board.
- Is familiar with NRCS and SCDNR programs, as well as any other agency programs that might affect the District.

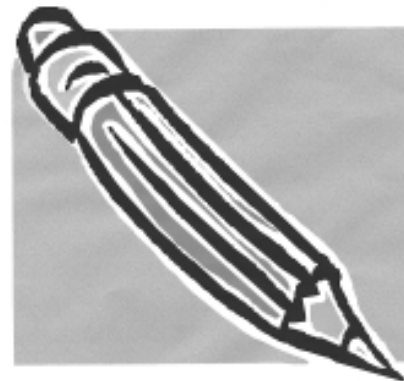
THE VICE-CHAIR

assists the Chair, performs the duties of the Chair in the absence of the Chair, and does whatever the Board assigns the position.



THE SECRETARY

- Develops complete records of all district proceedings.
- Records dates, place and purpose (regular monthly, committee or special meetings.)
- Records persons invited who are absent, all who are present and the organizations they represent (if applicable) and the person who presides over the meeting.
- Records all motions in full and insists action be completed on each item of business.
- Informs the Chair of any business that should come before the board.



THE TREASURER

- Develops complete and accurate records of all income and expenditures and periodic financial reports.
- Pays bills approved by the Board and issues receipts for incoming funds.
- Maintains separate accounting of any funds received for specific purposes.
- Assures that bills authorized for payment are paid on time and recorded in the minutes.
- Arranges for surety bonds.



MEETINGS OF THE BOARD



Meetings

Meetings are fundamental to conducting conservation district business. Commissioners participate in the district board meetings, committee meetings of the SCACD, and other organizations and agencies. Regardless of the nature of the meetings, there are many techniques for making them run smoothly and efficiently whether you are presiding or not.

Participants, including the general public, should be notified well ahead of the meeting (preferably at least one week). This notification should include an agenda listing the reason for the meeting, location, time, estimated meeting length and important reference material. Most meeting agendas follow this basic order:

1. Call meeting to order
2. Minutes of previous meeting
3. Treasurer's report
4. Correspondence received
5. Reports
6. Conservation plans approved
7. Old business
8. New business plans
9. Plans for next meeting
10. Adjournment



It is a good idea to give the people attending a reminder phone call a day or two before the meeting.

Pay close attention to meeting arrangements. Plan in advance for a comfortable room, parking, refreshments, etc.

Arrange the room so that everyone can make eye contact. Use a round table when possible and consider placing nameplates in front of everyone.

Many districts utilize the guidebooks published by NACD for meetings.

Regularly scheduled meetings

All conservation districts should hold monthly board meetings.

Board meetings should have two basic purposes:

1. to determine conservation district policy
2. to monitor its implementation

Board meetings also serve educational, social, and communication purposes.

At these meetings, the board of commissioners takes official action on plans, programs, and functions of the district. The minutes are the official record of the transactions and proceedings of the board of commissioners and should contain complete and accurate information.

Special meetings

A special meeting means any meeting called for the purpose of dealing with an issue that cannot wait until the next regularly scheduled meeting.

At a special meeting, **only that business for which the meeting was called can be conducted.** A special meeting may be held without the public notice that is normally required. However, the person calling the meeting shall give as much advance public notice as is reasonable under the circumstances.

The written minutes of the special meeting must contain the nature of the issue and the proceedings that occur at the meeting, including reasons for calling the special meeting.

Continued or Reconvened Meetings

A continued or reconvened meeting is one in which there was not sufficient time to cover all the business on the agenda at the regularly scheduled meeting. Public notice, including date, time and place of the continued or reconvened meeting, shall be given by announcement at the original meeting. **Only matters appearing on the agenda of the original meeting may be discussed at the continued or reconvened meeting.**

Closed or Executive Session

Under certain conditions, the district board may go into executive session for discussion of a specific issue. Upon a formal motion made, seconded and carried, all parties may recess, but not adjourn, open meetings for closed or executive sessions. Any motion to recess for a closed or executive session shall include a statement of the justification for closing the meeting, the subjects to be discussed during the time of executive session, and the time and place the meeting shall resume.

The motion to recess into executive session, including the required statement, shall be recorded in the minutes of the meeting and shall be maintained as part of the permanent records of the district. Discussion during the closed or executive session shall be limited to those subjects stated in the motion. **No subjects shall be discussed at any closed meeting except the following:**

- personal matters of nonelected personnel
- consultation with an attorney for the district which would be deemed privileged in the attorney-client relationship
- matters relating to employer-employee negotiations whether or not in consultation with the representatives of the district
- preliminary discussions relating to the acquisition of real property

NO BINDING ACTION shall be taken during closed or executive recesses, and such recess shall not be used as a subterfuge to defeat the purposes of the Act.

After the completion of the closed or executive session, the chairman shall reconvene the regular or special meeting at the time and place specified in the original motion. The minutes shall reflect the time of the reconvening of the meeting, persons in attendance and official action taken in the reconvened meeting as a result of the closed or executive session.



Quorum

You must have a quorum of at least three of the five commissioners (not associate commissioners) to conduct any official business at a conservation district board meeting.

Agenda

The purpose of an agenda is to ensure orderly transaction of business and to give notice to the public regarding what will transpire at the meeting. Under the Freedom of Information Act, the agenda must be made available to the public at their request.

The agenda must list the time, date and place of the meeting and all items to be considered at the meeting. To ensure that nothing requiring board action is overlooked, the secretary should retain a file of all incoming and outgoing correspondence and notes on any other topics the board needs to consider at the meeting. The chair of the board should work with the district staff to develop a list of all topics to be placed on the agenda. The information contained in the agenda should be reasonably detailed to inform the public of the business to be considered at the meeting and to facilitate meeting efficiency.

Any decision or act that results in expenditure of funds, establishes or changes policy, represents an aspect, opinion or approval of an issue, or causes an obligation of any kind on the part of the district requires official action of the board of commissioners in an open meeting.



Parliamentary Procedure

Most meetings, especially formal meetings, are conducted according to parliamentary procedure, such as Roberts Rules of Order. Under these rules, a voting member suggests that the board make a decision by stating a motion (“I make a motion that we...”). A second member of the board states his or her support for the motion by seconding the motion (“I second the motion.”). If not seconded, the motion is not considered. If a motion is made and seconded, the board can then discuss the merits of the motion.

If a board member wants to change the motion, he or she can move to amend the motion (“I move that we make an amendment of the motion that...”). This amendment must be seconded and voted on. Several amendments can be added to the original motion. After discussion, the chair restates the motion and the board votes on the motion or “motion amended” and the decision is made.

A simple majority of the members present is required to pass the motion.

The above is a brief description of parliamentary procedure. Use some restraint in applying parliamentary procedure to provide the flexibility needed to address the details of issues. If the discussion becomes too controversial, such procedures may be useful and you may wish to appoint a parliamentarian.

DISTRICT EMPLOYEES

Many district employees serve as the initial contact between the general public and federal, state and local programs and activities. As such, well-trained, knowledgeable employees with abilities that cover a wide range of skills are important to daily district operations.

Volunteer board members often have limited time. Conservation District employees can help you implement your programs and policy more efficiently. They can also:

- Help coordinate board activities
- Provide objective input and professional expertise
- Provide information and data as requested
- Serve as an agent of the district to contact landowners, other agencies and others regarding district business
- Provide technical assistance to landowners

There are a variety of paid positions that may be filled: **District Manager, District Education Coordinator, Administrative Assistant, and District Technical Personnel.**

Employment Procedures

Before hiring, you should identify your needs for an employee. Analyze the tasks that need to be accomplished. Develop and/or revise the position description and establish minimum qualifications. Know what the position will cost the district and where the funds are coming from to support the position.

After deciding what the district needs and how the funds will be acquired, fill the position. This is the responsibility of the district board and only commissioners may authorize the hiring of an employee. Before starting active recruiting, the board needs to consider the following items:

- Details of employment
- Whether the position is full or part-time
- Probationary period
- Supervision
- Pay range
- Term of the position (permanent or temporary)
- Amount of sick and annual leave and other benefits
- Other facts important to the position



Prepare an application form and a position announcement. Advertise the position and take applications, check references and interview the applicants. The entire board, if not on the interview team, should be briefed on applications and interviewers' recommendations so it can make its choice.

After a candidate has accepted, notify the other applicants and establish a starting date. Make sure a new employee understands his or her responsibilities and how to carry them out.

Salaries and Benefits

Just as natural resources must be stewarded with care, so should conservation district employees. Staff turnover can be very costly in time and dollars. Benefits are an excellent way to retain quality employees.

Provide employees with a fair salary, professional development opportunities and benefits. Legally required employee programs include social security, state and federal income tax and workman's compensation. The district must also adhere to equal employment opportunity and other laws that must be followed by any employer.

Supervision

People are the primary resource of a conservation district. Part of your board responsibility is to supervise the paid district staff, associate commissioners, committees, and volunteers. You must also coordinate with agency personnel so everyone can carry out the conservation district mission effectively.

Staff Evaluations

Conservation District employees should be evaluated yearly to clarify expectations, identify continual professional development needs, and share concerns. This is the immediate supervisor's and the chairman's responsibility. The evaluation should be in writing and discussed with the employee. You can reasonably expect the following from staff:

- Attention to details of meetings
- Complete, concise, and accurate information
- Honesty in individual and organizational relationships
- Judicious use of time
- Meeting agreed-upon deadlines with notification if deadlines cannot be met
- Prompt response to requests for information
- Prompt return of phone calls
- Excellent quality of service to the public

In return for this, staff working for your board can reasonably expect of the board:

- Fulfillment of commitments within the agreed-upon deadlines
- Proper training
- Knowledge of district organization and programs
- Candid performance appraisal and assistance in meeting performance goals
- Support in controversial situations
- Easy access to commissioners by phone or visitation
- Loyalty, confidentiality, and sensitivity
- Incentives and rewards to promote and recognize accomplishments

District employees should have the opportunity for grievance at any time, if the need arises.

Board and Staff Relationships

Relationships between your board and staff must be effective. It can be very difficult for a district employee to have “five bosses at once,” especially if they offer conflicting input. The Board Chairman or his designee is normally the board member who works directly with the staff and is the supervisor of the district employee. He or she should maintain a keen awareness of employee concerns and initiate evaluations, salary increases and other personnel actions. The District Manager (if your district has one) should supervise the other district employees and the Board Chairman should work through the manager.

The types of tasks performed by board members and staff should be very clear. The board sets the policy and the staff implements it. Let the staff do their respective jobs and don’t expect them to do your job, too. Keep your respective roles as clear as possible at all times.

Volunteers

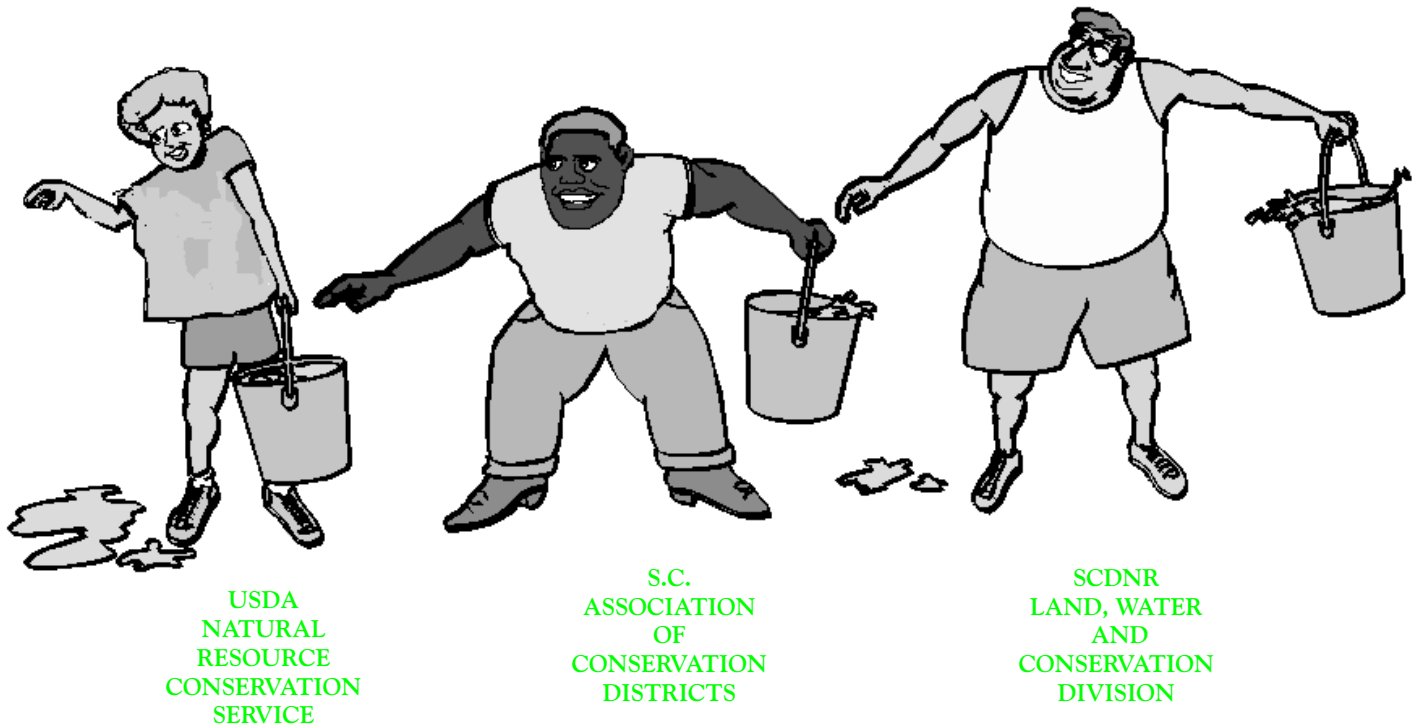
Most people involved in your district are volunteering their time and energy as commissioners, associates, and committee members or in other roles. For these volunteers to feel their service is worth contributing, they must see concrete achievements, and to do this they must be supervised and coordinated.

In many ways, supervising volunteers is similar to supervising paid staff. Develop position descriptions for volunteers just as you would for paid employees. This will help you focus on concrete needs for the position and assure the volunteer that you need someone to do a real job. The position description also acts as a written agreement, legally protecting the volunteer and the district. The district jointly sponsors the Earth Team Volunteer program with NRCS, which automatically provides these benefits.

Do everything you can to make volunteers feel comfortable and fulfilled in the service they are rendering to conservation. Volunteers are motivated by a variety of factors such as self-expression, philanthropy, and many others. The board should encourage these. Treat volunteers as coworkers, provide good working conditions, and promote them to greater responsibility as appropriate. Let them know how much you appreciate them, personally and professionally.

Commissioners and other conservation district volunteers serve without monetary compensation, but if they incur other expenses in the service of your district, try to reimburse them.

THE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP



The Conservation Partnership is an agreement entered into by the three parties to facilitate the working relationship within each conservation district.

As partners, we are interdependent, having independent responsibilities, and yet we depend on each other for successful delivery of programs.

TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Total Quality Management is a process designed to focus on customer expectations, prevent problems, promote open decision-making, and build commitment throughout the organization.

The **Conservation Partnership** and this handbook are evidences that the process is working.

VISION: A Productive Nation in Harmony with a Quality Environment

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

We share commitment to:

- Listening, anticipating and responding to our customers' needs
- Anticipating, identifying and addressing issues
- Decision-making at the lowest appropriate level

We pledge to work together by

- Advancing and practicing teamwork
- Involving each partner in the decision-making process
- Communicating, coordinating and cooperating
- Advocating ecosystem management- a holistic approach
- Maintaining and enhancing our grass-roots delivery system
- Building new alliances to expand our partnership
- Fostering economically viable environmental policies
- Improving the quality of life for future generations
- Sustaining and conserving our natural resources and environment

We will improve our efficiency and effectiveness by:

- Putting quality first
- Empowering people to make decisions
- Demonstrating professionalism and dedication
- Striving for continuous improvement
- Sharing training opportunities
- Promoting mutual respect, support, trust and honesty
- Sharing leadership and responsibility

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture helps individuals, groups, organizations and units of government to wisely use natural resources by providing direct, on-the-ground assistance in planning and implementation of conservation. NRCS has a Cooperative Working Agreement with your conservation district and SCDNR-LWCD, which says how the partnership of NRCS, SCDNR, and the District will work together on personnel, program delivery to customers, technical standards, facilities, equipment, data sharing, funding, liability and civil rights.

(See Appendix for the Cooperative Working Agreement.)

The district is served by a NRCS field office, usually located within the district.

NRCS work through the Conservation Districts includes assisting:

- Individuals such as farmers, ranchers, foresters, and land users
- Groups such as realtors, developers, land users, commodity organizations
- Units of government such as planning commissions, county and city councils, public works commissions

Technical services include:

- Whole farm and total planning to use, manage and sustain our natural resources
- Designing, surveying, laying out and inspecting construction of all practices outlined in the Field Office Technical Guide
- Inventorying and evaluating soil conditions
- Inventorying natural resources problems and planning solutions

Legal responsibilities include:

- Planning and carrying out federal community development programs such as the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) and PL-566 Small Watershed Programs (mostly for flood control)
- Planning and carrying out federal conservation programs such as cost-share programs (Forestry Incentives, Environmental Quality Incentives, Wildlife Habitat Incentives, etc.) and land retirement programs (Conservation Reserve and Wetlands Reserve)

In addition to providing services to the public, NRCS personnel are required to attend regularly scheduled District board meetings, special meetings called by the Board of Commissioners, and District, Area, and State Association meetings.

NRCS also assists the Board in establishing priorities and developing annual and long-range plans to address conservation problems.

NRCS also:

- Provides leadership in incorporation of NRCS concerns into the Partnership's annual and long-range plans
- Keeps the board informed about NRCS activities in the district, and requests that the board takes action on issues that require it
- Reviews and discusses with district officials the civil rights policies contained in the Cooperative and Mutual Working Agreements on annual basis

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Land, Water and Conservation Division

The primary mission of the SCDNR-Land, Water and Conservation Division is to help ensure that the natural resources of the state are managed wisely.

As the division of state government charged with administering the Soil and Water Conservation Districts Law, the SCDNR-LWCD provides professional, technical, and financial assistance to the state's 46 conservation districts in carrying out conservation programs.

The division also coordinates development of programs to address nonpoint source pollution; collects and makes available to the public a wealth of information about the land and related resources for wise land resource planning decisions; provides technical assistance in the design and use of "Best Management Practices."

The SCDNR has six additional divisions that contribute to the conservation of South Carolina's natural resources as well. They are the Administrative Services Division, Conservation Education and Communications Division, Law Enforcement Division, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division and Marine Resources Division.

As the division responsible for the coordination of South Carolina's conservation districts, SCDNR-LWCD provides funds and staff to the conservation districts for program planning and implementation, technical assistance, education and public affairs.

The SCDNR, through the Land, Water and Conservation Division, assists conservation districts by:

- Providing professional and technical staff assistance and financial assistance through state-appropriated funds and federal grants
- Assisting in developing annual and long-range plans for carrying out district goals and objectives
- Assisting in preparation of annual reports of each district
- Providing timely training for all district commissioners, associate commissioners, district staff, and other volunteers
- Developing, conducting and evaluating conservation education programs in concert with district commissioners
- Promoting programs of districts through the news media, exhibits, tours, conferences, visual aids, brochures, and staff presentations to civic, educational, agricultural, church, youth and other groups
- Securing the cooperation of State and Federal agencies in assisting districts and land users
- Assisting districts in assessing erosion and sediment reduction and stormwater management

South Carolina
Department of Natural Resources
Land, Water and Conservation Division
CONSERVATION SPECIALIST

Job purpose:

to coordinate the division's administrative, educational and technical functions within a multi-county area. The position is responsible for planning and implementing a variety of educational, promotional, training and technical programs as well as providing limited direct technical assistance as programs and needs dictate. The position serves as liaison between the division and the assigned conservation districts, district commissioners, watershed districts, watershed directors, RC & D areas, local Councils of Government, and local units of government within the assigned service area.

Essential functions include:

administrative assistance to the district staff members, correspondence, monitoring reporting needs, transmitting pertinent information to the boards on a monthly basis, inspection of state-owned equipment, coordinating meetings, and giving presentations for school and civic groups on behalf of the district. This position is also responsible for providing consultative services to schools and community leaders on educational or conservation programs and for insuring that annual planning and reporting is completed. Based on experience and/or training, some Conservation Specialists will also have statewide responsibilities assigned to them which will necessitate work and travel beyond the normally assigned districts.

Conservation Specialists serve in three major categories:

- administrative
- educational
- technical

As a commissioner, you can see that the Conservation Specialist has a broad range of assignments. To be sure that your district benefits from these services, it is imperative that during your Partnership planning (annual and long-range) you consider and combine your needs as a district with the special skills of the Conservation Specialist.

DISTRICT ACTIVITIES

Listed here is a synopsis of most, if not all, of the items a district will be involved with each year.

Annual report

The annual report is a published report of the district's yearly activities. The annual report can be timed to coincide with the end of the calendar year or the fiscal year. The best advice in preparing for the annual report is to collect photos and documentation throughout the course of the year. Record keeping is critical to having an accurate, comprehensive annual report to present to the public. In preparing to release this information to the public, plan your draft to be complete at the monthly board meeting prior to your scheduled publication date. This will give everyone the opportunity to make any needed changes prior to publishing.

Annual plan

This document should be derived directly from the long-range plan. It should be a 1/5th-scale model of your long-range plan with additional goals based on current needs. Specific short-term goals, which might not be included in the long-range plan, such as the completion of a grant proposal and its subsequent implementation or a pilot or trial project are examples of items that may be included in an annual plan but not the long range plan. Input from all the partners and from cooperating agencies and groups is critical to having a usable document that will produce results.

Audit

Each district is required to conduct an annual financial audit. A true audit will be done by a CPA and will involve some expense on the part of the district. In addition, there will be the time involved preparing the district's financial records for the CPA. The alternative to a true audit is to have the board conduct its own financial check. The requirements for this form of audit are for two board members other than the treasurer to perform a complete review of the status of the finances of the district, including a close examination of the checking and savings account records. The DNR-LWCD should be notified upon completion of the audit. DNR-LWCD does not receive the actual results of an audit, only the notification that one has been done for the current fiscal year.

Awards

There are many award categories. Some districts have their own awards in combination with the SCACD awards. For a complete listing of the various awards, check with your Conservation Specialist or your District Employee. Due dates vary by contest and are typically sent with the notification forms. Rules likewise vary as to the content and the amount of supplemental documentation allowed. Districts have the option of deciding to enter a contest. For example, we strive for 100% participation in the Goodyear contest, but even that contest is optional. The District Board will make the decision as to which awards competitions to enter. Record-keeping throughout the year will enhance your ability to put together a good awards entry.

Budget request

Both state and county governments require the submission of requests for appropriations. The timing will vary based on the planning schedule of the governmental unit, but will generally take place in January or February in anticipation of a July budget approval. It is extremely important that all the partners consider the district's needs for funding prior to the actual request. Be realistic with your requests, but don't be shy! It is a good idea, especially at the county level to be prepared to present your request in person. If your district provides benefits for the county, be sure to emphasize that in the proposal or request. Also, it is advantageous to "toot your own horn." Let county council know what you are doing for the citizens of the county.

Election

Your responsibilities include insuring that all potential candidates know the rules and regulations regarding election to either a district commissioner or a watershed director position. It is also your responsibility to attend to petitions and filing fees, deadlines, required numbers of petition signatures and the required documentation such as ethics forms or campaign disclosure forms. You should conduct a follow-up inquiry with the local election commission to determine if the potential candidate has met the requirements for being included on the printed ballot. Following the election, a second inquiry should be done to determine the successful candidate(s). The results should be forwarded to DNR-LWCD.

Correspondence

Correspondence generally consists of two types: agency and district. *Agency* correspondence will usually be related to projects that you are directly involved with, such as teacher workshops, clinics or seminars. *District* correspondence could be anything from something as simple as transmitting news releases about the local education contests to the local papers to something as complex as writing to the Congressional delegation regarding the Farm Bill. You might be expected to draft letters for your board. Sometimes you will only need to edit and approve correspondence written on your behalf by District Employees. Correspondence may involve considerable time between preparation and actual mailing and sometimes will have a deadline so short as to require personal delivery.

Equipment

Most districts own equipment for public use. It can range from the PVE no-till type drills to mulch-laying equipment. Periodic inspection, maintenance, record keeping, and advertisement may be part of your responsibilities. Tasks will vary greatly from district to district.

Ethics forms

Your responsibilities concerning ethics forms will include being familiar with the deadline for submission, and working with the district employee to insure that the copies are submitted and filed. District employee participation varies greatly from district to district. The District Employee's manual contains more information regarding the preparation of these forms. The deadline for submission is April 15th of each year. Failure to comply can result in a fine for the commissioner affected.

Financial reports

Financial reports are generally considered to be a function of the district employee. However, in your own interest, you should be familiar with the accounting system used in the district and in what reports are needed, including the due dates of each. A major part of your responsibility may lie in helping to train a new district employee in the financial record keeping system.

Oath of office

Each elected official must receive the Oath of Office prior to assuming the role as an official or voting member of the District Board. A Notary Public must legally give the Oath. Documentation of who is to take the oath will generally be sent to you from the state office with copies for signatures. Maintain the appropriate copies in the district files and send a copy to DNR-LWCD. A news release with an accompanying photo is also needed. (Save an extra photo for your annual report.)

Travel voucher

To be reimbursed for expenses incurred on official district business, you must submit a travel voucher to DNR-LWCD. The district employee is generally the person that prepares the voucher. You should insure that the preparer receives your mileage and receipts for lodging or other expenditures. Your reimbursement from the DNR is contingent on certain stipulations. Your conservation specialist can provide you with this information. You should follow up to insure that vouchers are submitted in a timely manner, especially at the end of the fiscal year (June 30). Before the voucher is sent to Columbia, your Conservation Specialist must review the travel vouchers for accuracy.



DISTRICT PROGRAMS

Your support and assistance with district programs is vital! The paid staff can do a great deal, but your assistance can mean the difference between an ordinary program and a very successful program.

To illustrate the work involved in carrying out one simple program, a step-by-step guide for an Arbor Day Celebration is shown below.

A general guide to District Programs will follow.

Arbor Day

This is an annual observance that is not participated in by all districts. Use records of past events to guide your preparation for such an event or call on a staff member with experience in conducting Arbor Day observances. Typically, such an observance will involve planting one or more trees in a public place such as a school, church, or park.

- Determine degree of participation by the District
- Set date for observance
- Select site for observance
- Select target audience
- Contact target audience
 - Draft letter to target audience
 - Make copies, fold, stuff envelopes, affix address labels
 - Affix postage, deliver to postal mailing point
- Draft promotional material(s)
- Make copies, fold, stuff envelopes, affix address labels
- Compile comments/edits
- Prepare final draft for general distribution
 - Prepare database for producing mailing labels
 - Make copies, fold, stuff envelopes, affix address labels or type addresses
 - Affix postage, deliver to postal mailing point
- Prepare listing of sites to be visited and appropriate routing for efficiency
- Secure permission to post promotional materials
- Post the materials (remove the materials after the event)
- Determine tree species and number needed
- Purchase tree(s) for planting
- Contact Extension or SC Forestry for planting tools
- Secure a speaker
 - Make phone contact first
 - Confirm with appropriate correspondence (map to site, date, time, etc.)
- Determine if refreshments will be needed

- Secure needed refreshments
- Deliver refreshments to site
- Clean up after refreshments
- Develop handout materials for distribution during event
 - Mail copies
 - Deliver to site
- Hand out the copies as appropriate during event
- Confirm the speaker by phone immediately prior to the event
- Photograph the event
- Draft a news release (seek approval if required)
 - Make copies, fold, stuff envelopes, affix address labels or type addresses
 - Affix postage, deliver to postal mailing point or hand deliver
- Clip copies of the printed story and distribute as required
- Draft appropriate correspondence to:
 - Sponsors
 - Speaker
 - Those assisting
- Draft thank you letters for support/participation
- Make copies, fold, stuff, affix labels, mail

Clinics

A clinic is just a mini-workshop. A clinic generally is geared to one topic such as pond management, beaver control, wildlife habitat establishment, installing waterbars, or drip irrigation. Clinics are targeted to a specific audience. Usually the district will receive a request from an individual or group for information or the district will see a need to share information on a timely subject or program.



Carolina Coastal Adventure

This workshop for high school students is generally a follow-up for the students who attended the Youth Workshop at Clemson. The students gain knowledge about our coastal environment by participating in hands-on activities. They study the beach and marsh habitat and collect marine samples on a DNR research trawler.

Earth Day

Earth Day is celebrated in many districts. Participating in this global environmental observance may provide an opportunity for the district to spread its conservation message. Your involvement could be as simple as photographing the event for news releases and the annual report to completely organizing the event, manning an exhibit, or giving a presentation to a group.

Envirothon

This is a team competition for high school students in which they are tested in the areas of soils, water, forestry, wildlife and a current topic such as recycling or groundwater. Any high school in the state will be eligible to register through their conservation district for this statewide competition. You may be involved with recruiting or training the team.

Essay contest

This annual writing competition is for grades 5-9. The topics include soil, water, forestry, and wildlife. Your responsibility may range from distributing essay fliers, to visiting schools, putting together a judging panel, and handing out the awards. This program will vary from district to district.

Farm-City

This observance is an excellent opportunity for the district to join with the agricultural and business communities to promote conservation and to celebrate the partnership of the two. You may be asked to prepare a meeting, including organizing speakers, planning meal functions, arranging transportation and tour sites. Whether you are part of the planning or not, your presence at the functions is evidence of the district's support of both business and agriculture.

Goodyear contest

This contest is an annual competition and is an excellent way to evaluate your district's activities for the previous year. The Goodyear Tire Company sends a basic evaluation form and the DNR sends a supplementary form both of which must be completed, reviewed by the district board, signed, and then submitted to DNR-LWCD for judging.

Poster contest

Sponsored for grades K-4 plus special education classes, this contest is conducted annually and culminates with the state winners being recognized by having their poster displayed at the State Museum. Rules fliers are distributed each year with the current topic and due dates for submission of entries. Photos and news releases are critical to continued success within the district.

Recognition programs

These vary from district to district. Recognition of accomplishments, whether it is youth, board members or some segment of the public or one of your area land users, is a win-win situation. It shows the person or persons that you recognize and appreciate their work. It may also motivate others to become active in conservation. News releases should be prepared on all recognition meetings.

SCACD committees

Each commissioner is asked to serve on one of the South Carolina Association of Conservation Districts' standing committees. SCDNR employees may serve as staff advisor to one or more of these committees. As advisors they may send notices out to the membership, take minutes, and provide follow-up in the form of a completed document from that committee to submit to the policy positions paper published each year. Your job is to attend the meetings and provide the committee with your insight and knowledge.

Seminars

The district may conduct seminars on various natural resources-related topics. Commissioners should be involved in the planning, coordination and implementation phases of these projects. A seminar may be considered a "more- in- depth" clinic and may serve to provide information on more than one topic.

Soil Stewardship

This annual program sponsored through NACD incorporates both religious and educational aspects of natural resources management. A district may be involved in distributing the materials to churches and/or schools as well as holding dinners and tours to promote the event.

State Fair

Districts may be involved in assisting the State Association, NRCS and DNR in planning and staffing the conservation booths at this annual event held in October. Specific information will be related to you through the Partnership.

State conferences

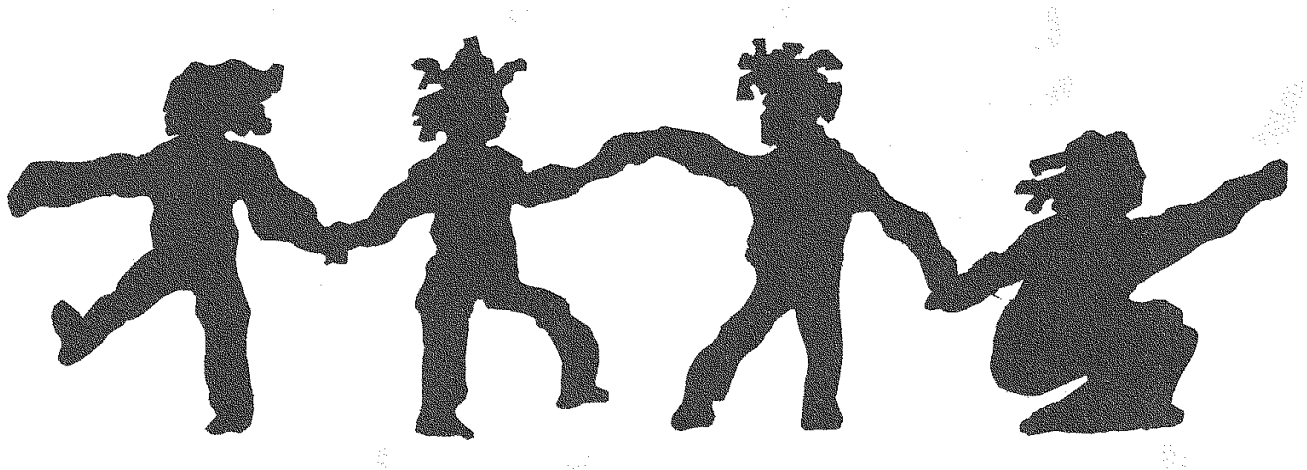
These conferences are held throughout the year in partnership with SCACD, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Land, Water and Conservation Division of DNR. All commissioners should attend. This is the only opportunity that you have to meet with your fellow commissioners from around the state. It is an excellent time for exchanging ideas, renewing old friendships and also finding out what is happening on the national conservation scene. This is also the business meeting for the SCACD. All business is voted on at these meetings.

Teacher workshop

Sponsored by the district, these programs are held on a county and multi-county basis. Commissioners should be involved in various aspects of this district program including the planning, coordination and implementation. These courses are open to all teachers in the specific conservation district(s) that is/are sponsoring the workshop. Depending on how the program is set up, a teacher may receive recertification and/or graduate credit.

Youth Workshop

This annual event for rising sophomores, juniors and seniors is held at Clemson University and focuses on soils, water, forestry and wildlife conservation. Conservation Specialists serve as counselors throughout the week-long workshop. You, as a commissioner, can assist in getting delegates to attend by taking advertising fliers to the schools, writing articles promoting the workshop for the local paper, speaking to youth groups or individuals regarding the workshop, and selecting the final applicants from your district. Invite your delegates to a board meeting after they have attended the workshop. This will give you an idea of how the workshop is being conducted and what the young people are learning. A short slide set will be available from DNR to aid delegates in their presentation.





Laws and why they are important:

Conservation District Law - so Commissioners can understand the powers and authorities granted to them and act accordingly.

Watershed Law - so Commissioners can oversee the Watershed Districts and their Boards of Directors and understand how these powers and authorities fit with the Districts.

Freedom of Information Act - so Boards do not meet illegally or render their decisions void because they did not properly notify the public; so the Commissioners understand what materials in the local office are subject to the Act and which are not.

Ethics Law - so Commissioners understand what they can and cannot do as part of an elected Board as an individual elected official; so Commissioners do not ask the staff to do anything illegal; so Commissioners are not fined for not turning in their Ethics Forms annually.

Civil Rights Titles of the Voting Rights Act of 1964 – so the Board can assure that all its operations are conducted according to law and policy. It is the policy of Districts that they will comply with the state equal employment opportunity and civil rights policies. Therefore, Commissioners as individuals and elected officials must comply with these policies.

Formal Agreements:

Mutual Agreement with USDA and State of SC - covers the Partners' relationship, cooperation, administrative commitment, and alliance for nondiscrimination.

Cooperative Working Agreement with NRCS and SCDNR-LWCD - supplements the Working Agreement, says how the partnership of NRCS, SCDNR and the District will work together on partnering, personnel, program delivery to customers, technical standards, facilities, equipment, data sharing, funding, liability and civil rights.

Local Agreement – agreement with no-till drill vendors or maintenance people, small farmers groups, or local governments for work during emergencies.

Partnership Agreement – agreement between SC Association of Conservation Districts, SCDNR-LWCD, and NRCS to work together cooperatively to provide services to all customers.

Planning Documents:

Long-range Partnership Plan – is a list of the districts' long-range goals and how they are to be achieved. This plan is updated every five years and used to produce the annual plan at the beginning of the work year. Input from the public and all partners is included.

Annual Partnership Plan – is a list of annual goals and how they are to be achieved. This plan is updated annually and comes from the long-range Partnership Plan.

Abbreviations:

ACP - Agricultural Conservation Program - no longer exists. Used to be the conservation cost-share program on farmlands. Some practices are still in effect.

APO - Annual Partnership Plan - annual plan of operations for the District, SCDNR, and NRCS within a District.

BMP - Best Management Practice - conservation practice which is chosen as most practical for an individual site.

Coastal Council - planning and regulatory body of the state which works in coastal areas.

COG - Council of Governments

Conservation Compliance - meeting all requirements of the 1985 and 1990 Farm Bills so you can be eligible for money from USDA. Covers land that is "highly erodible"

Conservation Plan - official NRCS and District record of land users' decisions over time to perform conservation practices. Required for conservation compliance.

Conservation Planning - (holistic, ecosystem, whole-farm, etc.) - working with land users to plan the best use of land and to decide on systems of conservation practices to use.

CRP - Conservation Reserve Program - enacted by the 1985 Farm Bill; retires cropland to trees, grass, perennial wildlife foods or a combination of the three

DC - District Conservationist - NRCS position that oversees the NRCS work of a District.

EQIP - Environmental Quality Incentives Program - Part of the 1996 Farm Bill, it provides cost-share money for installing conservation practices under a contract.

EWP - Emergency Watershed Protection - NRCS program which helps clean up after natural disasters like floods and storms.

1990 FACTA Farm Bill - farm bill passed in 1990, called the Food, Agricultural and Conservation Trade Act (FACTA.)

1996 Farm Bill – Federal Law which abolished most federal conservation programs and established new programs.

FIP - Forestry Incentive Program - NRCS program which cost-shares with landowners on forestry practices.

FOCS - Field Office Computer System - NRCS computer software that has conservation plans and soils and other resource information in it for each land user.

FOTG - Field Office Technical Guide. Written by NRCS, it is also the District's standards and specifications for each conservation practice.

FSA - Farm Services Agency (a USDA agency)

1985 FSA Farm Bill - farm bill passed in 1985, called the Food Security Act

GIS - Geographic Information System - computer mapping system used to identify important resources.

GPS - Global Positioning System - uses satellites for exact ground locations.

Local Work Group - under the 1996 Farm Bill, a group of people in a county identified and convened by the District to design federal conservation programs.

Long-range Partnership Plan - plan written with public and Partner input to set out work over five years for the District, SCDNR and NRCS within a District.

LTA - Long-term agreement - Conservation agreement covering several years of installing conservation practices with cost-share funds. No new contracts being written because ACP no longer exists

LTC - Long-term contract - See explanation for LTA

MOA - Memorandum of Agreement - previous agreement with Partners.

MOU - Memorandum of Understanding - previous agreement with Partners.

NACD - National Association of Conservation Districts

Nonpoint Source Pollution - pollution without a single, identifiable source (like a pipe carrying waste coming out of industrial plants) that may come from many, scattered sources (examples are cattle manure, oil and gas from cars). This is usually the type of pollution whose source could be agricultural lands and is the state and national focus of controlling water pollution.

NRCS - Natural Resources Conservation Service

PQST - Partnership Quality Steering Team - team of top staff of SCDNR, SC Association of Conservation Districts, NRCS, and District Employees Association to work on Total Quality Management issues

QIP Team - Quality Improvement Team - team assigned to work on an issue under TQM.

RC&D - Resource Conservation and Development - USDA program for rural and community development funded through NRCS.

SCACD- South Carolina Association of Conservation Districts

SCDEA- S.C. District Employees Association

SCDHEC - SC Department of Health and Environmental Control

SCDNR- LWCD - S. C. Department of Natural Resources, Land, Water and Conservation Division

Sodbusting - one of the Conservation Compliance requirements. It states that you cannot bring land into annual crop production if it was not farmed for a certain period of time without a conservation plan.

Standards and Specifications - requirements of individual conservation practices (see FOTG)

Swampbusting - one of the Conservation Compliance requirements. It states that you cannot drain, fill, clear or otherwise alter wet areas for the purpose of annual crop production.

S&WCD- Soil and Water Conservation District

TQM - Total Quality Management - concept of providing quality service to customers and running an effective and efficient operation.

USACE - U. S. Army Corps of Engineers - The division of the Army that administers laws relating to navigable waterways and wetlands.

USDA - U. S. Department of Agriculture

Watersheds - area that sheds water to a certain point. A watershed can also be an area designated by the USDA-NRCS Watershed Program.

WHIP - Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program - enacted by 1996 Farm Bill. Provides cost-sharing for wildlife practices

WQIP - Water Quality Incentives Program - no longer exists, but contracts funded under this may still be in effect

WRP - Wetland Reserve Program - pays landowners to restore wetlands and puts them under long-term easement

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